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ABSTRACT

All content areas utilize the four basic skills--reading, writing, arithmetic, and oral communication. Children's literature can be used to teach these skills for four reasons: (1) there is a children's book for every concept to be taught; (2) children enjoy reading; (3) children's literature can be used to teach content, process, values, and attitudes; and (4) children's literature can be used to explore and clarify a child's subjective personal values and attitudes. Wordless picture books, drama, enjoyable series books, and books about language and words can be used to teach reading. Children's books can also be used in a variety of ways to provide a stimulus for writing. Many children's books can motivate students to explore math in new and practical ways. Finally, to understand the newest basic skill, oral communication, we must realize that we communicate for a variety of functions--informing, feeling, ritualizing, and imagining--and that communication competence involves four abilities: repertoire of experiences, selecting strategies, implementing strategies, and evaluating performances. Children's literature can aid the child in developing oral communication competence through listening to stories, telling stories, creative drama experiences, use of puppets, discussing the story with peers, and answering questions about the story in class discussions. (Suggested titles are included.) (JL)

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Using Children's Literature to Teach Basic Skills

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Introduction

The Basic Skills Proficiency Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title II) added to the three R's of reading writing, and 'rithmetic, a fourth basic skill--oral communication. As I conduct basic skills in-service workshops for teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels, teachers' reactions to this legislation range from "As if I didn't have enough to do already!" to "Finally, oral communication, the real basis of all learning, is getting some attention in our schools."

I must admit the first reaction is the most common. Is it any wonder? Teachers are already overworked and underpaid. Their question to me is, "How can I do it all?"

Integration

In a recently published document, Essentials of Education (1979) a number of administrative and educational organizations emphasized the need for integration and coordination of the basic skills with the content areas:

> The interdependence of skills and content is the central concept of the essentials of education. Skills and abilities do not grow in isolation from content. In all subjects, students develop skills in using language and other symbol systems; they develop the ability to reason; they undergo experiences that lead to emotional and social maturity. Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking, and writing about science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social and cultural heritage. As they learn about their world and its heritage they necessarily deepen their skills in language and reasoning and acquire the basis for emotional, aesthetic and social growth.

Relationship of the Four Basic Skills

Integration of the four basic skills is not difficult since they are so closely related. We know, for example, that oral communication proficiency is important to the acquisition of reading and writing skills (Mackintosh, 1964).

All content areas utilize all four basic skills. Oral communication is used in all classrooms. Oral reports, symposiums and role plays can all be utilized to increase both a knowledge of history and speaking skills in a history class. Demonstration speeches in home economics or industrial arts can aid student understanding of concepts and provide skill development opportunities in oral communication. Lab work in science can often be most effectively accomplished by students working together and discussing their findings.

Similarly, writing belongs in all curriculum. Students take notes on their reading in social studies, science, home economics, etc. They write lab reports in science, essays in foreign language classes, explain theorems on tests in mathematics, and write on family relationships in home economics.

Many of the basic mathematical skills are important to other basic skill development. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics prepared a set of Recommendations for School Mathematics in the 1980's (Taylor, 1982). The first recommendation was that problem-solving should be the focus of school mathematics programs. The second recommendation was that math instruction should include much more than computational skills. The following ten skills were outlined as important for math instruction (Taylor, 1982):

1. Problem solving
2. Applying mathematics to everyday situations
3. Alertness to reasonableness of results
4. Estimation and approximation
5. Appropriate computational skills
6. Geometry

7. Measurement

8. Tables, charts, and graphs

9. Using mathematics to predict

10. Computer literacy

Note how many of these--problem-solving, estimating reasonableness of results, and predicting--relate to reading, writing, and oral communication. Students solve problems in all three of these basic skills. They predict how successful they will be when arguing that their papers should not be due on a certain date. They estimate the reasonableness of the results of their writing--have they completed the haiku according to the formula?

Perhaps the relationship of reading to the other three skills is the easiest for most of us to "see." Certainly students read content in all their classes. Oral reading--both by students and to students--has been linked to reading achievement (Wilkinson,). Loben's (1963) general conclusion after reasearching 237 elementary school children, was that "competence in spoken language appears to be a necessary base for competence in writing and reading." (1963, 88) Wilcox (1977) indicates that exposure to good literature is important for good writing.

When we combine these findings with the relationship of mathematical skills outlined previously, we begin to see the importance of integrating basic skills.

Learning theory tells us that active learning and reinforcing learning in a variety of ways enhances learning. Thus, integrating basic skills can enhance the learning of them all.

What Children's Literature Can Do

Chidlren's literature can be used to teach basic skills and to integrate basic skills instruction into all content areas for several reasons. First,

American publishing houses produce approximately 2200 hardbound books for children every year. Obviously, when we add paperbacks to this number, the total reaches incredible proportions. Among these are picture books, poetry; folk literature including tales, fables, myths, legends, and epics; modern fantasy including imitations of folk tales, science fiction, and original tales; historical fiction; biographies; books on sports; animal stories; mysteries; family stories and problem novels; realistic fiction; and informational books on numerous topics and "how-to-do-it, play-it and make-it books." Thus, for nearly every concept we wish to teach, there is no doubt a children's book which we can use to teach it.

Secondly, children enjoy reading. In a column published in the December Journal of Reading, Lloyd Kline (director of publications for the International Reading Association) cited the following statistics on children's reading in the United States:

> 1. Thirteen magazines for young people rank among the nation's top 200 in circulation. These 13 magazines alone reach at least 9-12 million of the nation's 45 million school age youngsters. Undoubtedly, millions of youngsters also read the numerous other magazines published for young people as well as adult magazines such as Sports Illustrated and Rolling Stone.
> 2. There are about 39,000 to 40,000 different children's books now in print in the United States.
> 3. There are more than a million paperback copies of Beverly Cleary's books now in print. And Cleary is just one of many popular authors of children's books.

Data collected by the Association of American Publishers, Inc., indicate the sales of juvenile paperbacks jumped 45.7% between 1977 and 1978. Evidently children are reading a great deal.

Third, children's literature can be used to teach content, process, and values and attitudes. Literature can help students gain meaningful facts. Realistic fiction and informational books are particularly helpful

in teaching content.

In terms of process, children's literature can be used to help children learn to classify, generalize and infer, analyze, compare, and make predictions. Answers to such questions as "How are these two books on sibling rivalry alike?" require independent thinking and promote thinking processes which are transferable to other works of literature and to other content areas.

Finally, children's literature can be used to explore and clarify a child's subjective, personal values and attitudes. In addition, books can call on children to take an objective viewpoint.

The remainder of this paper will discuss ways in which children's literature can be used to teach reading, writing, mathematics and oral communication.

Reading Instruction

Perhaps one of the first ways children's literature can be used to teach reading is through wordless picture books such as The Surprise Picnic (Goodall), One Fine Day (Hogrogian, 1971), Goodnight, Dear Monster (Morris, 1980) or A Boy, A Dog, A Frog and a Friend (Mayer, 1971). Research being conducted at Northwestern University suggests that children who "read" by orally telling the plot of wordless picture books learn to read more easily than children who don't engage in this activity.

Drama can be utilized to teach basic reading skills. Identifying topic sentence, main idea and content clues can be effectively taught using the dialogue in scripts. Identifying mood, character traits, cause-effect, humor, plot, similies, and character motivation can also be covered. In The Chicago Public Schools, the ESEA Title I program, "Teaching Reading Skills Through Drama," did improve reading scores, measured by the Iowa

Test of Basic Skills. The program also had dramatic results in improving student attendance, attitude about self, school, family, and authority, and leadership qualities (Cleary, 1981).

Children's literature provides motivated practice for the decoding and comprehension skills students need. Students are motivated because they are reading books of their chioce, and as such, the reading experience is its own positive reinforcement. The student desires to read more.

Several series are now available which enable students to read books they enjoy. The I Can Read series includes Frog and Toad are Friends (a Caldecott Honor Book) and Frog and Toad Together (Newbery Honor Book) is one of these. A companion series is the Early I Can Read series, including Dinosaur Time. The Beginner Books series includes The Bears' Picnic (Stan and Jan Berenstain), Are You My Mother? (P.D. Eastman), and The Cat in the Hat (Dr. Seuss). The accompanying series is the Bright and Early Books for Beginning Beginners. This series includes Great Day for Up (Dr. Seuss), Bears on Wheels (Stan and Jan Berenstain), and I'll Teach my Dog 100 Words (Michael Frith).

Books about language--its history, how English compares to other languages, words and how they fit into the system of language--can help create an enthusiasm in children about their language and how it works. Books like Dandelions Don't Bite: The Story of Words (Adelson, 1972), Is That Mother in the Bottle? Where Language Comes From and Where It's Going (Davidson, 1972) Thereby Hangs a Tale: Stories of Curious Word Origins (Funk, 1958), How Our Alphabet Grew (Dugan, 1972) and Danger Men Talking (Chase, 1969) are just a few of the books which can introduce children to the topics of word origins, the history of the alphabet, and the history of language.

To help children learn the structure of their language, books on foreign language and codes are useful. Muriel Feelings' Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book (1973), It's Fun to Speak French (Bragden, 1962), Spaghetti for Breakfast (Josyln and Barry, 1965), How the Withered Tree Blossomed (Matsutoni, 1969), and At Home: A Visit in Four Languages (Hautzig, 1968) are just a few of the books by which children can compare English words with their counterparts in other languages. By making such comparisons, children are better able to generalize about the morphology of their native language.

Children enjoy the writing and deciphering of codes. Such activities lead to an understanding that a code system, like a language system, operates by a set of agreed-upon rules. Experimenting with the rules of a code system can be useful in the study of the rules of the English language. Two books which are particularly good in this area are How to Write Codes and Secret Messages (Peterson, 1970) and CDB! (Steig, 1968).

Books which focus on the sounds of language can be stimulating and amusing to children. Books such as Plink Plink Plink (Baylor, 1971), The Little Book of Big Tongue Twisters (Curtis, 1977), and Rabbit and Pork Rhyming Talk (Lawrence, 1975), when read aloud to children, can provide children with an enjoyable experience with English phonology.

Books about words enable children to become familiar with the process of how words are changed in structure and meaning to create new words. The processes of borrowing, coining, and combining, along with word forms such as acronyms, euphemisms and jargon can be taught to children through the use of children's literature. The following short list provides a "starting-place" for examining books about words and their meaning:

Basil, Cynthia and McCaffery, Janet. Nailheads and Potato Eyes. New York: William Morrow, 1976.

Briggs, F. Allen. The Play of Words. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1972.

Funk, Charles. Horsefeathers and Other Curious Words. New York: Harper, 1958.

Gwynne, Fred. A Chocolate Mouse for Dinner. New York: Windmill/ Wanderer Books, 1976.

In addition to teaching the alphabet, alphabet books can build an interest in the sounds and symbols of our language. Listed below are a few of the excellent alphabet books now available:

Ipear, Dahlov. I Love My Anteater with an A. Knopf, 1964.

Lionni, Leo. The Alphabet Tree. Pantheon, 1968.

Miles, Miska. Apricot ABC. Little, Brown, 1969.

Miller, Edna. Mousekin's ABC. Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Scarry, Richard. Richard Scarry's ABC Word Book. Random House, 1971.

Sendak, Maurice. Alligators All Around. Harper and Row, 1962.

Talon, Robert. Zoophabets. Bobbs-Merrill, 1971.

Wildsmith, Brian. Brian Wildsmith's ABC. Franklin Watts, 1963.

One interesting alphabet book which can be used to teach a variety of language skills is The ABC of Bumptious Beasts (Kredensen, 1966). The following is an example:

Mouse

One mouse in a house on a cheese-eating spree
Is quite proper, grammatically speaking;
But you can't have two mice in two hice
drinking tea,
Or two mouses emphatically squeaking.
If a mouse cuts a piece of Swiss cheese,
that's a slice,
Which is singular, just like the mouse.
But if slice were plural just like our mice--
Then that mouse would be slicing a slouse.

Hosie's Alphabet presents unusual vocabulary-- the "quintessential" quail and "ruminating" zebra. It's an excellent book to help children increase their vocabulary.

Writing

Children's literature can stimulate children to write. As Wilcox (1977) suggests:

> Exposure to good literature is probably the best experience future writers can have. Books can help children to explore, to feel, and to expand their imaginations. They can extend young people's worlds and help develop their reasoning powers. Reading or hearing fine literature promotes a feeling for beautiful imagery, rhythm, figurative speech, and cadence of our language. Through good books prospective writers are introduced to form and structure which they will imitate when they begin to create their own stories and poems. Exposure to the fine writing in many children's books can constitute the foundation for a young writer's unique self-expression.

Picture books provide a stimulus for writing, even in the upper grades. Zoophabets (Tallon, 1971) is an alphabet book. Each letter has a made-up beast, its name, where it lives and what it eats. Children can create their own zoophabets using Tallon's easy formula.

We can stimulate children's interest in writing poetry through such books as Harry Behn's Cricket Songs (1964)—a book of haiku poetry for children. Children can also write cinquains about a favorite character from a book, contrast one character with another through septain, or write a limerick about a character in a book.

After reading Fables (Lobel, 1981) or Kipling's Just So Stories, students can make up fables and pourquoi stories of their own.

Teachers can utilize children's books in a variety of ways. They might read a story to its climax and then ask students to write the ending. A variation of this idea is to read the beginning of a book (for example, the first paragraph of A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle) and ask students to develop a short story around it. Students might write sequels to stories about their favorite characters. What, for example, happens

to Cinderella after she marries the prince?

Children's books are often written from the viewpoint of an animal or inanimate object. Children might read books such as Virginia Burton's The Little House, Margery Williams' The Velveteen Rabbit, Rachel Field's Hitty, Her First Hundred Years, or Hardie Gramaty's Little Toot. Children could then be encouraged to write their own stories from the perspective of object of their own choosing--a school desk, a pair of shoes, a caterpillar, etc.

When teaching letter writing, a student can write a letter to the character in the book or to the author of the book expressing criticism, enjoyment, or questions concerning the book. Students could pretend to be a character in the book and write a letter to another character or write a letter to a friend encouraging the friend to read the book.

Students can compare and contrast characters in the book, write about how they would have solved a particular character's problem differently, create an advertisement for a book, write about an adventure they have had similar to the one in the book, write an article about the book for the school newspaper, write a description of a character from a book as if they were describing her/him to a friend. The use of children's literature in the teaching of writing is limitless.

Mathematics

Children's literature provides numerous opportunities to increase math skills. As is true in other basic skill areas, using children's literature can motivate students to explore math in new and practical ways.

A fun way to introduce math is through Carl Sandburg's "Arithmetic" (The Sandburg Treasury: Prose and Poetry for Children, 1970), a humorous poem describing the up's and down's of math.

Counting books are an excellent means to teach numbers to children. Some can also be used to teach addition and subtraction. Of particular use are Anno's Counting Book (Anno, 1977), The (George Doubleday 1971), Marcel Marceau Counting Book (Mendoza, 1971), Ten What? A Mystery Counting Book (Hoban, 1974), One More and One Less (Maestro, 1974), and One Was Johnny (Sendak, 1962).

Collections of Mother Goose rhymes can be used to teach simple addition and subtraction. Many rhymes include numbers such as "Baa Baa Black Sheep," "I Love Sixpence," "Pairs of Pears," and "One, Two Buckle My Shoe." Children can make up story problems for their classmates to solve: How many bags of wool did black sheep have? Add that number to the number of plums Jack Horner pulled out of his pie.

Even with numberless rhymes, children can count various objects in the illustrations. How many children are in the old woman's shoe? Granfa' Grif Had a Pig and Other Rhymes Without Reason from Mother Goose (Tripp, 1976), Mother Goose: A Collection of Nursery Rhymes (Wildsmith, 1964), Gregory Griggs and Other Nursery Rhyme People (Lobel, 1978), and The Mother Goose Book (Provenson and Provenson, 1976) are a few of the Mother Goose books with excellent illustrations.

Problem-solving skills can be developed through the use of such books as Harold and the Purple Crayon (Johnson, 1955)--what should Harold draw next? Changes (Hutchins)--what can the shape turn into? or Masquerade (Williams, 1980)--where is the jewel hidden?

For older students Math Menagerie (Kadesch, 1970) and The I Hate Mathematics Book (Burns, 1970) provide math riddles, experiments, mazes and puzzles which are both challenging and enjoyable.

Norton Juster's The Phantom Tollbooth (1961) tells the story of the boy, Milo, who finds a kit for a tollbooth, puts it together, and travels

to a land where he meets, among others, .58 of a child, the smallest member of a family with 2.58 children. Much of the book's humor consists of such "take-offs" on the logic of mathematics. This book could be a motivating tool in teaching such concepts as average.

Oral Communication

Because oral communication is the newest basic skill, and one in which many teachers have no training, some explanation is necessary.

We communicate for a variety of functions (Wood, 1977):

Controlling -- we want to control another's behavior

Informing -- we want to offer or seek information

Feeling -- we want to express or respond to feelings

Ritualizing -- we use these to maintain and facilitate social interaction (greeting, leave-taking, taking turns in conversations, participating in culturally appropriate speech modes such as teasing, punning, etc.)

Imagining -- we "pretend" such as role-playing, storytelling, dramatizing, theorizing, etc.

Although these five functions of communication are presented as discrete, in "real life" such is not the case. An utterance may serve a variety of functions. In addition, young children, as well as adults, can engage in all five functions with varying degrees of effectiveness. Our instructional task is to help students become proficient in the five functions by providing them opportunities to engage in them.

"Communication competence" refers to a person's knowledge of how to use verbal and nonverbal language in all sorts of communication situations. Communication competence involves four abilities:*

Repertoire of Experiences. To be flexible communicators, children must be capable of performing a wide range of communication acts required by their social environment. As children grow in experience, they acquire a number of communication strategies which may be used to accomplish these various speech acts. An

important function of speech communication instruction is to provide experiences which expand the repertoire of speech communication strategies from which children may select when dealing with everyday situations which are important to them.

Selecting Strategies. Taking into consideration the relevant characteristics of the communication context -- participants, topic, task, and setting -- children select from their repertoire of strategies those which they perceive to be the most appropriate given th- specific situation at a given moment in time. Implicit in the selection process are criteria which help children decide how to act in communication situations. A second important function of speech communication instruction is to provide an opportunity for children to identify and sharpen the criteria they use in choosing communication strategies.

Implementing Strategies. Having determined a strategy to use in a given communication context, children must be willing to carry into action that strategy. Through implementation, children experience themselves using verbal and non-verbal behaviors designed to accomplish a given intent. A third important function of speech communication instruction is to enable children to experience themselves in dynamic interaction as they give verbal and non-verbal expression to their strategic choices.

Evaluating Performances. Having performed a communication act, children must evaluate their communication behavior in terms of its appropriateness to the child and to others. As one grows in competence, one makes informed judgments about one's own speech communication. These judgments influence the strategie choices that are made and the implementation that occurs in sustaining the communication act and ultimately contribute to the repertoire of experiences which provide the broad base for future communication encounters. A final important function of speech communication instruction is to provide opportunities for children to sharpen their critical awareness of self and others in moments of communication interaction.

*Adapted from R.R. Allen and K. Brown. Developing Communication Competence in Children. Skokie, IL: National Textbook, 1977.

Several activities related to children's literature can aid the child in developing oral communication competence: listening to stories, telling, stories, creative drama expereiences, use of puppets, discussing the story with peers, and answering questions about the story in class discussions.

Vukelich (1976) suggests that listening comprehension can be developed through storytime. Reading to children and asking them questions of recall, recognition of main idea, plot sequence, predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions, interpreting emotions, and application to real life increases

students' comprehension skills important to reading as well as communication.

Asking students to tell the stories of wordless picture books is an excellent way to increase their oral communication skills of informing and imagining. Books such as The Surprise Party (Hutchins, 1969), The Surprise Picnic (Goodall), Anno's Journey (1977), The Wonder Ring: A Fantasy in Silhouette (Wetherbee, 1978), and A Boy, A Dog and A Frog (Mayer, 1971), are excellent books for this purpose.

Children can also read books and then tell the story to small groups of classmates. Teachers can read the beginning of a book such as Goggles (Keats, 1969) and ask children to complete the story round-robin style--each child adding a portion to the story. The original story can then be read and comparisons made between the two.

A variation of this technique is to read What Do You Do With A Kangaroo? (Mayer, 1973) or What Do You Say, Dear? (Joslin, 1961) and have children verbalize the answers to the questions.

Creative drama is "any kind of 'acting out' which brings part of a person's imagination or physical self into the action. This includes pantomime, improvisation, unison movement, rehearsed skits, performed plays--anything where the actor, child or adult, has incorporated something of self into the movement, expression, or dialogue. . ." (Feinberg, 1976, P. 184). Creative drama strengthens oral communication skills through building vocabulary, moving children away from egocentricity, developing fluency, and improving discussion skills. Ritualizing, imagining, and feeling functions are particularly enhanced through creative drama. Children's books such as Frederick (Lionni, 1973), Where The Wild Things Are (Sendak, 1963) or Stuart Little (White, 1945) are particularly enjoyed by children.

Johnson (1966) encourages the use of puppetry in children's literature for developing oral communication skills: Puppeteering has often proved to be the first step for the inarticulate child toward the development of oral communication (p. 673). Similarly, Reich's (1960) research indicated that children gain facility in their oral language through the use of puppets.

A class can be divided into small groups with each group assigned a children's book or they may be asked to choose one of their favorites. After reading and discussing the book together, they can make puppets (sock, stick or face), scenery, and props and then perform their show for classmates. Such an activity does much to enhance all five functions of communication. Stories such as William's Doll (Tolotow, 1972), Are You My Mother? (Eastman, 1960), Hope for the Flowers (Paulus, 1972), The Velveteen Rabbit (Williams,), and Tasha Tudor's Book of Fairytales (1961) are excellent stories for puppetry.

Classroom discussions about children's literature help children build their oral communication skills. Just as children learn to read by reading, to write by writing, and to add by adding, they learn to communicate by communicating. Asking children to debate about the ideas in a book such as Twenty and Ten (Bishop, 1952) can increase their controlling and informing skills. Brainstorming possible solutions to problems presented in books like Jacob Have I Loved (Paterson, 1980) can enhance imagining and informing skills. Panel discussions comparing the view of death in books like Charlotte's Web (White, 1952) and Bridge to Terabithia can increase informing, ritualizing, and controlling skills. Comparing books by the same author is also appropriate .

Children's literature can also be used to increase a child's knowledge about communication. A Chocolate Mouse for Dinner (Giognne, 1976) humorously teaches the concept that meanings are in people rather than in the words themselves.

Poetry is a good medium to use to teach basic communication concepts. A poem such as "Lost and Found" (Moore, 1975) can be used to teach the concept that differences in perception can lead to differences in communication:

Lost and Found

LOST:
A Wizard's loving pet.
Rather longish.
Somewhat scaly.
May be hungry or
upset.
Please feed daily.

P.S. Reward.

FOUND:
A dragon
breathing fire.
Flails his scaly
tail
in ire.
Would eat twenty LARGE meals
daily
if we let him.
PLEASE
Come and get him.

P.S. No reward necessary.

Feelings and how they affect communication can be taught through a poem like "Leave Me Alone" (Holman, 1970):

Leave Me Alone

Loving care!
Too much to bear.
Leave me alone!

Don't brush my hair,
Don't pat my head,
Don't tuck my in
Tonight in bed.

Don't ask me if I want a sweet,
Don't fix my favorite things to eat,
Don't give me lots of good advice
And most of all just don't be nice

But when I've wallowed well in sorrow,
Be nice tc me again tomorrow.

The importance as well as the frustrations of ritualizing in communication can be demonstrated through a poem like the following (Milne, 1924):

If people ask me,
I always tell them:
"Quite well, thank you, I'm very glad to say."
If people ask me,
I always answer,
"Quite well, thank you, how are you today?"
I always answer,
I always tell them,
If they ask me
Politely. . . .
BUT SOMETIMES

I wish

That they wouldn't.

Conclusion

The uses of children's literature to teach basic skills is limitless. This paper provides only a few examples. Hopefully it will stimulate teachers to think creatively about how they can use children's literature to help teach basic skills.